



Al-Risala 1985

May

Editorial

The concept of religion has become distorted in the modern mind, as can be seen in the following example.

“Mr. Pechnikov is the Director of the Children's theatre, Moscow. Talking to newsmen in New Delhi he said that the Ramayana the Mahabharata belong to the entire humanity. The Ramayana is much more than a religious book. It reflects man's eternal quest for truth.” (*Patriot* 24 November 1984)

In this statement, religion, rather than being viewed as the answer to man's eternal quest for truth, is taken to be the embodiment of time-honoured traditions of a particular nation. Such religion made up of traditions can obviously be of significance to the nation it belongs to, but is not necessarily valuable to all mankind. Religion has thus been brought down to the level of traditions.

The truth of the matter is that religion is precisely what modern man has been seeking outside it. Religion, the true divine path revealed to His chosen people from time to time, is as universal as the sun. It is a truth exactly like other scientific truths. Religion and truth are synonymous. In actual fact, another name for the right answer to man's quest for truth is religion. The religion revealed to various prophets by God was one and the, same. Since God's true religion had undergone distortion and adulteration at the hands of its followers, God, decided, therefore, to reveal once again the true form of religion to His messenger, the Prophet Mohammad. God's message – as He had promised it would be – is preserved in the Qur'an. Islam is by no means a new religion. It is simply the authentic version of the same divine religion as had been revealed, from time to time, to other prophets.

2 May 1985

“Seek knowledge, even if it lies in China” (Hadith)

Junayd of Baghdad was once asked what the end of the path was. “A return to the beginning,” he replied. According to Lao-Tsu, “Going far means returning.”

Nature Takes its Course

Persistent problems in implementing the communist ideal of public ownership show that efforts to collectivize what is essentially a private concern amount to more than a fight against a man-made system; they are a fight against nature itself, and such a struggle is doomed to failure.

One of the basic principles of the Communist ideal is that there should be public ownership of all enterprises, and all goods should be free. One of the first departments to come under the influence of this ideal was agriculture. Ever since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 there have been continual attempts, in Russia and other communist countries, to collectivize agriculture, and bring farming entirely under the control of the state. These efforts, however, have repeatedly met with failure.

The big thrust towards collectivization was initiated in the 1930's by the dictator Josef Stalin (1879-1953). It soon became clear, however, that the transition from private to public ownership would not be smooth. In order to ward off the threat of starvation, the state awarded plots, averaging 0.3 hectares each, to collective farmers. These plots were to be farmed privately, in order to augment the farmers' income and ensure that they were not swamped by the wave of sudden transition from individual to collective farming. This was considered as a "temporary evil", a concession to necessity, which would be disbanded once the legacy of the previous economic system disappeared.

Far from being a temporary evil, however, such measures proved to be more a permanent part of human nature. It is always painful for man to be torn away from his natural environment, and this was no exception. An estimated 5.5 million people died of hunger and related diseases when they were forced into state and collective farms on Stalin's orders.

But an even more conclusive indictment of the state-owned system of agriculture comes from the fact that, despite massive investments in the public sector, the private sector continues to flourish in the Soviet Union. Thousands of private farmers own small plots of land in Georgia and central Asia. According to a November 1984 article in *Questions of Economy*, a monthly journal put out by the Academy of Sciences, Moscow, plots and small holdings account for 25% of total agricultural production in the Soviet Union. More than half the nation's potatoes, and roughly a third of its meat, eggs and other vegetables are produced privately. These figures are even more astounding when one compares them to the proportion – just 2.8% – that private plots constitute of all the farm land in the country.

The prices that privately-grown vegetables fetch in Moscow central markets make a mockery of the communist ideal of free food for all. According to a Reuter report from Moscow, dated December 28, 1984, tomatoes from Georgia were fetching 15 roubles a kilo on the Moscow market. Cauliflowers from central Asia were going for 12 roubles apiece. Muscovites complain about the high prices but it is a question of paying them or going without vegetables:

“While Muscovites complain at the swarthy “millionaires” from the South whose big houses and flashy cars are legend, without them fruit and vegetables would be hard to find at all.”

(The Muslim, Islamabad, December 29, 1984)

All this goes to show that the communist state has failed to provide people with their basic needs of life, let alone provide them free of cost. People have had to fall back on the private sector for elementary provisions. The private sector continues to outstrip the public sector, despite the advantages which the latter enjoys under the patronage of the communist state. Even Russian leaders, faced with the reality that, the state alone simply cannot meet the nation’s needs, have admitted the importance of the private sector. State planning chief Nikolai Baibakov told the latest session of Soviet parliament:

“Economic leaders should devote more attention to giving help to collective farm workers in managing their private plots.”

Thus communism has done a complete U-turn since the days of Stalin, when complete collectivization was considered the ideal. Now there is a grudging acceptance of the inevitability of private enterprise, and the need to assist it. It is not very difficult to see why the system of private enterprise should be so resilient in face of encroachment by the state. It is because private enterprise is not a man-made system; it is an integral part of human nature, and efforts to change human nature are doomed to failure.

Furthermore, the state in itself is not separate entity. It exists only as a conglomeration of individuals. The incentive for buying and selling, giving and taking, earning and paying wages, must come from the individual; it cannot come from the state. That is why, however much “the state” may seek to accumulate powers to itself it cannot do so, for eventually the state boils down to the individuals that compose it, and it is inevitably they who will inherit the power, both economic and political, which “the state” apportions to itself.

5 May 1985

The Hidden Hand of God

The American president, Ronald Reagan, according to an official of the Republican party of the U.S.A., keeps a golden ferrule in his pocket all the time. This ferrule was presented to him by one of his friends five years before he was elected president. Ronald Reagan holds that it was the powers of this amulet which saved him from the attempt made on his life, as well as from many other misfortunes. He cannot entertain the idea of parting with it. Once when he was asked by a government official whether he still kept it in his pocket, he replied: "I sure do." Then he took the ring out of his pocket and showed to him.

This is no doubt a form of superstition. The events which make the life of a man are often mysterious and puzzling; man seeks to explain them through reason, but fails in his attempt. Some unknown forces seem to be at work which appear to be responsible for his success or failure. He, therefore, tends to attribute them to purely material factors. Once I asked a successful businessman the secret of success. He thought for a while, then replied 'Luck'. Then he said if there were three reasons for it, he would say, "first, luck, second, luck and third, luck!"

This mysteriousness which pervades our life is due to there being an invisible God behind the scenes. Since man is unable to trace him, so he substitutes a visible God for an invisible one, be it in the form of a ring or any other object. But attaching importance to material objects is utterly irrelevant to God's will. This habit can bring one closer neither to material success nor to the love and blessings of God.

The Japanese Experience

In August 1945, the U.S.A. dropped two atom bombs on Japan reducing two of its major cities to ruins. Strangely enough, the Japanese seem to bear no grudge against the Americans, for, they say, it had only reacted to Japan's violence in the arena of war. The responsibility, therefore, needs to be shared by each side. This realistic attitude on the part of the Japanese has seen them through all kinds of adversity and brought them to extraordinary heights of progress in modern times.

Both the big industrial cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bustling with life, became enormous areas of devastation in a matter of minutes. Within a ten-mile radius every kind of life – human, animal and vegetable was blown to bits. One and half million people died on the spot. Ten thousand of them simply disappeared. Yet these cities have now been built up once again with wide streets, spacious houses, parks and gardens, all of which has a modern look. Only one ruined building has been left as it was, in order to remind one of the grim punishment meted out to them during the second world war.

When Mr. Khushwant Singh visited Japan, he learnt, much to his astonishment, that the Japanese do not exploit the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in order to discredit the U.S.A. It is other nations, on the contrary, who have exploited the same events for this purpose. When Khushwant Singh asked the reason behind this attitude, a Japanese replied in a surprisingly calm tone:

“We hit them first at Pearl Harbour. We killed a lot of them. They warned us of what they were going to do, but we thought they were only bluffing. They beat us fair and square. We were quits, and now we are friends (The Hindustan Times April 4, 1981).

A memorial has been erected to commemorate the dead, the victims of a gruesome tragedy. In the museum are displayed photographs depicting death and destruction on a mass scale. About 70 lakh Japanese visit Hiroshima every year to witness this spectacle. In the course of conversation with the Japanese, however, one can sense the hidden feelings of hatred against Americans. But they do not let it rule their lives.

By virtue of such temperament they have scaled such great heights of progress in a very short span of time. They own neither petrol resources nor mineral wealth, most of their raw materials having to be imported. Keeping all these drawbacks in view, it is most amazing that they have dominated world markets. This is mainly owing to the superior quality of their goods.

Mr. Khushwant Singh also enquired about the prospects of the legal profession there. He was told that it was not a flourishing business. The reason being the fact that the Japanese preferred settling disputes on their own to suing in the courts. Willingness to admit faults by each party is the surest way to bring quarrels to an end. It is only when either party seeks to place the whole blame on the other side that the

quarrel takes a turn for the worse. Whereas the very gesture of shouldering the blame softens up the other side, with the result that the dispute dies a natural death.

This realistic attitude has greatly benefited the Japanese in many respects. For instance, this makes them place their trust in one another. They thus save the time and money they would otherwise expend on lengthy legal documents. There are fifty thousand lawyers in the U.S.A., while there are only 11 thousand in Japan. Such legal experts are just not in demand.

Most of the commercial institutions trust in verbal understandings. Formerly it was practiced only among Japanese, but now foreign investors have also started to take advantage of this practice. Avoidance of unnecessary legal obligations invariably speeds up the work.

Essentially, such an outlook gives rise to unity. It is undoubtedly the greatest force that contributes to the success of a nation. In the words of an expert of Japanese affairs the secret of Japan's success lies in:

"Never quarrelling amongst themselves, always doing everything together" (The Hindustan Times April, 1981).

7 May 1985

Retiring into nature to understand the nature of things

The earliest Chinese philosophers “withdrew into the wilderness, the forests and the mountains, there to meditate upon the order of nature, and to observe its innumerable manifestations.

(Science and Civilization in China, by J. Needham.)

Looking Beyond the Self

When the financial straits of one's family spur one on to earn money, all one has in mind is to solve family problems by means of the money earned. Problems concerning the outside world do not matter. Even when more money becomes available than the family actually needs, the excess wealth is also considered a possession of the family.

The requirements of the poor and the needy – of relatives and acquaintances do not take pride of place. It does not seem a good idea to spend hard-earned wealth on catering to the requirements of others besides one's family.

As the affairs of the family had been the initial stimulus, it is but natural that the problems of the family should be given prime importance. All else pales into insignificance.

In similar vein, Islamic movements and institutions in the present day and age have received their inspiration from the immediate issues facing the Muslim world. Naturally their outlook and activities have their limitations. Such communal motivation, in fact, accounts for their not attaching sufficient importance to communicating the message of Islam to non-Muslims.

The narrow, confined attitude which is reflected in the example of the family is common to the attitude adopted by Islamic movements, which derived their inspiration from their community. Such domestic affairs like reform and progress of their nation, safeguarding and domination of their own community were the issues around which their activities revolved.

Any national movement invariably thinks in terms of the promotion of the interests of its own nation, rather than in terms of the welfare of other nations. All other issues outside the realm of its own community are relegated to a secondary position.

The intention of the divine message, in the main, is to save man from eternal doom and to show him the straight path which makes man worthy of paradise. Far from mere concern for one's community, a divine mission takes into account all communities; it derives its inspiration from God rather than from the community to which it belongs.

What makes this matter considerably more grave is the fact that the prophet of Islam was the last of the prophets, and, therefore, Muslims are now the trustees of his prophetic mission. It is for them to perform the task for which the prophets were sent by God. When we keep this in view, the communication of the divine message to non-Muslims becomes our prime responsibility.

Failure to perform this task which is of the utmost importance, is certain to incur the wrath of God. No amount of good deeds can atone for this offence.

Occult Flourishing

The occult is flourishing in France, where last year an estimated eight million French people, or one in every four of the working population consulted a clairvoyant, sorcerer or astrologist, reports AFP from Paris.

According to the tax authorities, there are 50,000 registered clairvoyants – more than there are priests or doctors – with a business turnover from 500 to 600 million dollars.

With the deepening economic recession, more and more people are turning to the occult for relief for their physical and psychological ailments.

Why do people turn to clairvoyance or the occult for a solution to their problems? It happens that frequently man comes face to face with the hard truth that the material resources at his command are insufficient. A desperate need for a prop to rely upon derives him towards some mysterious source.

In this quest for unknown factors which he could hold responsible for shaping events, man often attributes them to some human being' like himself. This, however, is nothing but an illusion, it is just turning to something which is as powerless as he is and is no solution to the problem.

The one and only thing which man can depend on is God. It is a pity that acceptance of the fact that visible resources are powerless, far from bringing man closer to the realization of this truth has, lead him further away from his true destination who has been forgetful of his Lord, has missed his chance, after being within reach of it. Having found a clue to assist him in apprehending the reality, he had, nevertheless, forfeited the opportunity to establish contact with it by turning to a creature who is powerless in comparison with the All-Powerful God. God alone is the solution to his problems. God alone can serve his needs.

Why Calamities Befall Man

When a train is about to leave a station, the guard blows a whistle. The purpose of this whistle is to warn people of the train's impending departure, so that anyone still on the platform can come and take his seat on the train. But there are two ways of looking at this whistle. If it is considered to be just a noise, then it will have no meaning. But if it is considered to be an alarm, then it fits into place and takes on its proper meaning.

The same is true of natural disasters. They too can be looked at from two different angles. Our planet is at various times afflicted by drought, earthquakes, hurricanes and other such calamities. Some philosophers look at these disasters on their own and see no point in them. So they attach to them the label "problem of evil".

Prophets, however, look at the same events from a different angle. They look at them as a source of admonition and instruction. Looked at in this way, natural disasters become intensely meaningful. They become nature's warning system, telling us of what is to come.

God's prophets have explained these events as a small preview of the great calamity that will befall man on the Day of Resurrection. They are a reminder that we are all heading for a dire day – one in which God will appear in all His power and glory. Every mortal man will be brought before Him in an absolutely destitute and helpless state. Man will want to flee, but there will be nowhere for him to take refuge. He will cry out for help, but there will be no one to come to his rescue. The very events which happen on a small scale in this world will occur on a grand scale when God raises man from the dead. These calamities are a reminder of what will befall us on that day. Then, the veil will be entirely lifted and reality exposed in total form. In this world it is partially lifted when some calamity afflicts us, so that we can gain a glimpse of reality before its total manifestation.

Wise is the one who considers such calamities as a warning of nature rather than a senseless evil. One who interprets them as nature's alarm system will humble himself before the Lord, and set about mending his ways. If they are looked at as a sign of the evil of nature, on the other hand, then they will only induce confusion and contumacy. And there is a world of difference between these two forms of mentality. The former leads one towards heaven, while the latter brings one closer to hell fire.

Finders, not Losers

One can sum up the state of the Muslim community today by saying that they are afflicted by a persecution complex. Wherever one looks one finds Muslims haunted by a feeling of having lost something. Everywhere they are complaining of persecution by other nations, of having had something taken away from them.

Closer scrutiny will tell one the nature of those things that Muslims complain of having lost. One will find that it is political power, government posts, economic resources, social influence and material gain that Muslims feel they have been deprived of. To their mind, they have been done out of these things by other nations of the world.

But in fact the Muslims have only themselves to blame for the losses they have incurred. It is their own neglectfulness that has taken them where they are. It is not a question of them having been deprived; it is a question of they themselves having failed to come up to the required mark. Still, what is even more important is that, even along with all these losses, there is still one thing that no one can take away from them. They may have lost worldly wealth, but they are still owners of great spiritual wealth. The religion of Islam is still with them, fully intact. They still have the final divine scripture, preserved in its original state. They are heirs to a prophet whose teachings still retain the vitality of when he first imparted them to the world. What the Muslims have, then, is greater than what they have lost. How strange that they should feel their loss, mere trifle though it is, and be unaware of the much greater treasure that they still retain.

To say that the path to worldly progress is barred before the Muslims is a highly debatable point. But even if one goes along with the general consensus of Muslims opinion and admits that it is, then still they have the chance to excel in the next world, and success there is better and more lasting than worldly success. How come they are so concerned about worldly loss, when they still have access to the much greater gains available in the hereafter.

Muslims may not be able to find what they seek from men, but they can still find it with God. If they concentrate on serving the divine cause, then they will find that God will provide them, in much greater measure than men could ever do, with all that they seek.

All the blood of one's body

Professor Paul Dirac died in Florida, U.S.A., in October 1984 at the age of 84. Recipient of the Nobel Prize and many other awards, he was considered – after Newton and Einstein – the greatest scientist of modern times. He is known mainly for his development of quantum mechanical theory – in effect the physics of the smallest part of the atom – and his effective prediction of anti-matter before it had been experimentally discovered. His “anti-matter” and “anti-universe” became the leading physical ideas for explaining the character and contents of the contemporary universe, its origin and history. J.G. Crowther’s obituary to Dirac in *The Guardian* (November 4, 1984) was fittingly given the headline “Prophet of the anti-universe”.

Dirac’s discovery of the first anti-particle, known as a positron, revolutionized the world of nuclear physics. Students were naturally interested to know how he arrived at this world-shaking discovery. His answer often proved somewhat disconcerting. “When people asked him how he got his startling ideas about the nature of sub-atomic matter, “Crowther writes, “he would patiently explain that he did so by lying on his study floor with his feet up so that the blood ran to his head.”

Dirac’s answer might appear tongue-in-cheek, but in fact what he said was quite true. Great intellectual feats can only be accomplished by letting all the blood of one’s body run to one’s head – by channel-ling all one’s energy into the intellectual pursuit one had undertaken.

Few people actually do this. They rather tend to diversify their efforts. Their failure to concentrate on a single goal renders all their efforts incomplete and ineffective. Every worthwhile task demands all the strength that an individual can muster. The only way to be successful in one’s work is to give it all one has.

12 May 1985

The attraction of worshipping “as forefathers worshipped” (Qur’an, 2:170)

“Ancestor worship is the most conservative of all religions. It invites us to take a sentimental view of our weaknesses and a heroic view of our strengths.”

Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960), quoted in *The Guardian Weekly*, October 14, 1984.

An Untold Story

As an ordinary worker, Mr. P.N. Pathak, joined the *Hindustan Times* Staff in 1958, and owing to his devotion and dedication to work finally succeeded in securing the high post of Deputy Superintendent of its composing department. His early death of heart failure, at the age of 50 on December 27, 1984 brought his career to an untimely end.

The note in the newspaper on this sad occasion, said, quite simply, "He rose to the present position by sheer hard work." (*The Hindustan Times*, December 28, 1984)

After having completed his education in Allahabad, Mr. Pathak worked for some time with the *Times of India* and Indian Express, then he joined the staff of the *Hindustan Times* where he found the atmosphere conducive to dedicated work. It involved a long and laborious struggle of 25 years to reach this high post, but before he had time to enjoy the fruits of his labour, death cut his career short.

Man's fate indeed seems tragic and ironic. He works hard in this world to achieve some goal but hardly has he been able to reap the fruits of his labour, than he is removed from the scene.

How distressing is this end of life! Yet no one stops to give it a thought. Everyone sets himself to repeating the same story as his predecessor. And how many of these stories reach a happy conclusion? The tale of every human being remains incomplete. Yet no one seems to be concerned about finding the reasons. No one appears keen enough to discover the path which will lead him to complete his story successfully.

Every human being in this world is, in fact, an incomplete story. As one seems to near one's destination, one is suddenly taken away. How strange it is then for life to be sans destination. Stranger still is the negligence of man towards this gravest of realities.

But this is only a temporal way of looking at things. We have these feelings because we think of our final destination as being in this world, and not in the hereafter. It is only when, with the help of God, we change this attitude that we understand that completion, fulfillment and happiness belong to the next life and not to this.

14 May 1985

Translating the Scriptures: Spreading the word of God

The Bible has been translated – in part or whole – into almost two thousand languages, according to a report published in *The Times of India* (22.2.85).

“The words of the Bible could be read in 1808 languages by the end of last year, according to a worldwide group of Bible societies, reports AP.

The entire Bible has been published in 286 languages and the new testament in another 594, according to the United Bible Societies. Partial translations of the Bible have appeared in an additional 928 languages.

Complete Bible translations were available in 109 African, 90 Asian and 55 European tongues. In Latin America the Bible had been translated into Spanish and Portugese and full versions were to be published soon in two South American Indian languages, it said.

“The new testament had been translated into 175 African and 146 Latin American tongues.”

The Qur'an, on the contrary, has been translated into only in a few languages so far.

Muslims takes enormous pride in being chosen as the bearers of the authentic divine scripture. Far from being a matter of pride, it is a matter of great responsibility, calling for accurate translations into every language of the world. The blessings of God, promised to the faithful, are; in fact, bound up with their performing this duty – of spreading the divine message contained in the Qur'an. This is a twofold duty: duty to God and duty to man. Failure to perform this office, far from eliciting God's blessings, will incur His fearful wrath.

14 May 1985

God bestows sovereignty on whom He wills, and takes it away from whom He wills
(Qur'an, 3:26)

In 1978 the Shahinshah of Iran gave an interview to *World* magazine. "With an army of 700,000," he claimed, "no one can overthrow me." He was deposed just a few months later, in February 1979. His army remained with him till the end.

Both on one Plane

The daily *Telegraph* of Calcutta (January 10, 1984) has published a photograph captioned:

“A little Israeli girl using a picture book to teach Hebrew to an Ethiopian boy at Eliat on the Red Sea coast. The boy arrived with thousands of other Ethiopians recently.”

In view of the widespread death and destruction in the wake of the grim and tragic famine in Ethiopia, the Government of Israel formulated a plan to rescue the starving Jews in Ethiopia – the Flasha, numbering about 2500, and at the moment they are being re-settled in Israel. The air service employed for the purpose was officially named ‘Operation Moses’. The Israeli premier, Mr. Shimon Peres, delivered a speech before the parliament on this occasion and said:

“We shall continue this noble and humane rescue act and shall not interrupt it until the last of Ethiopia’s Jews has arrived with us.”

In ancient times the prophet Moses received divine commandments to rescue the Israelites from the clutches of the cruel ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh, and settle them in the Sinai valley. Because the saving of the starving Jews appeared to be on a parallel with religious mission carried out by Moses, the venture was named after him. Obviously this amounts to presenting a nationalistic event in religious terms.

In similar vein, Muslims take up nationalistic and worldly issues and pass them off as religious acts. They flee in order to safeguard their rights and term it ‘emigration’ as being on the same pattern as that followed by the prophet and his companions. They wage war on purely nationalistic issues, but label it ‘Jihad’ or holy war. What is nationalistic worldly in its nature can never have religious value in the eyes of God. In the next world, God will remove the mask of religion, making the reality plain to everyone.

15 May 1985

Absolute knowledge cannot be communicated by words

“If it (the reality) could be talked about, everybody would have told their brother.” (Chuang Tsu)

Muhammad: The Prophet of Islam

Part I, Chapter V (contd.)

The historian Ibn Hisham describes the beginning of the Prophet Mohammad's mission in the following words:

"When Mohammad was about to be chosen for prophethood, it became his habit to wander far from town, out of sight of all traces of human population. There he would lose himself in the valleys and mountains of the desert surrounding Mecca."

Abdullah Ibn Zubair says that the Prophet used to spend one month of every year in the natural surroundings of the Cave of Hira. In one poem attributed to Abu Talib, he talks about his nephew "ascending and descending to and from Hira" (Ibn Hisham),

When the Prophet was moved to seek out the reality of life, he would then leave the world of humans and take himself to the world of nature – the world of mountains and lonely sands. Thus a righteous soul seeks to leave the world of human activity for the world of divine activity. The desert terrain is ideal for this task.

In order to understand Islamic geography, the Romanian Orientalist Konstan Virgil George (B. 1916), himself traveled to Arabia. He writes in his book, *The Prophet of Islam*:

"Until one has spent some time in the wilds of Arabia and the Middle East, one cannot begin to understand how the vastness and tranquility of the desert expands the human intellect and fortifies the imagination. There is a great difference between European and Arabian plants. There is no plant in the arid reaches of the desert that does not exude a sweet fragrance; even the acacia trees of this land are aromatic. The desert stretches for 3,000,000 square kilometres. Here it is as though man comes into direct contact with God.

"Other countries are like buildings in which massive walls obstruct one's view; but there is nothing blocking one's vision of reality in the vast open reaches of Arabia. Wherever one looks, one sees endless sands and fathomless sky. Here, there is nothing to stop one from consorting with God and His angels."

In the Period of Ignorance prior to Islam, some people of Arabia entered into a pact among themselves. Termed "Hilf-e-Fudhool", the aim of this pact was to curb plunder and oppression. Three men were responsible for this initiative: Fadhl Ibn Fudhala, Fadhl Ibn Wada'a and Fudhail Ibn Harith. The pact was called Hilf-e-Fudhool (Pact of the Fadhals) after them – all three of them bearing similar names. It remained in force during their lifetimes, to be remembered only by their names afterwards. Zubair Ibn Abdul Muttalib has made mention of this pact in some poems:

“The Fadhals made a solemn pact That no oppressor would be able to operate in Mecca. They made a promise, and agreed among themselves, That the citizens of Mecca, and those who came from elsewhere, would be safe”. (*Raudh-ul-Anf* by Suhaili).

Following the attack on Mecca by Abraha's army of elephants in the year of the birth of the Prophet, there was a civil war in Arabia. This war was called “Harb-ul-Fujar” (War of Sinners), for it was fought during the Sacred Months when fighting was prohibited. It was during this period that a member of the Yemenese Zubaid tribe brought some merchandise to Mecca. A Quraishi chieftain, Aas Ibn Wa'il Sahmi, bought the goods but did not pay the required price. The Yemenese pleaded his case before the Meccan public in an eloquent and heart-rending manner; and soon his plight became well-known. Some sympathizers of the Banu Hashim and Banu Tameem, aroused by this incident, gathered in the house of Abdullah Ibn Jud'aan, under the auspices of Zubair Ibn Abdul Muttalib, to discuss the matter. They decided to revive the Hilf-e-Fudhool and vowed among themselves to take the side of the wronged person and ensure that he was paid his rightful due. Some people then went to Aas Ibn Wa'il, took the merchandise from him, and returned it to the owner.

This pact was made at the beginning of the Prophet's life. Though contracted by the Arabs before Islam, it met with his approval. “I myself was present in the house of Abdullah Ibn Jud'aan when the contract was made,” he once said. “Even after the advent of Islam, if I had been invited to be present on such an occasion, I would have accepted. They vowed to ensure that every person should be paid his rightful due, and that no tyrant should have the upper hand over the weak” (*Seerat Ibn Kathir*).

Ibn Hisham has recorded some incidents in this connection which show that latter-day Arabs continued to be influenced by the Hilf-e-Fudhool. Waleed Ibn Utba was Amir Muawiya's nephew. When the latter became Commander of the Faithful, (41 AH), Waleed was placed in charge of Medina. During this period he had a dispute with Husain Ibn Ali over some land in a village by the name of Dhul-Marwa. When Waleed attempted to occupy the land by force, Husain reacted with these words:

“By God, either you will do me justice or I will take my sword, stand up in the Prophet's mosque, and invoke the Hilf-e-Fudhool.”

Abdullah Ibn Zubair was present at the time, and echoed Husain's words. “I also swear by God,” he said, “that if Husain has recourse to Hilf-e-Fudhool then I will take up my sword in his defence. Either Husain will be given his rightful due, or we will both give our lives.” Miswar Ibn Makhrama Zuhri, and Abdullah Ibn Uthman Tayimi after him, heard about the matter and made the same resolve. When Waleed Ibn Utba was informed, he handed over Husain's rightful share of the land (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. I, p 146).

These events show that the Islamic method of countering discord and victimization in society is one based on Hilf-e-Fudhool. Responsible people in society should commit themselves to take immediate action when one person wrongs another. They should take the side of the oppressed, exerting all their power to compel miscreants to cease persecuting others and right their wrongs.

Muslim society is in particular need of such an arrangement today. Cases of the powerful oppressing the weak, the rich exploiting the poor, the resourceful victimizing the helpless, are commonplace. People see all this and remain indifferent to the plight of persecuted sections of the community. Responsible people in society show no interest in settling individual cases of injustice. They are only too willing to make speeches and hold rallies to promote their image as servants of the people and apostles of peace and harmony; but if they were really working for peace, harmony and justice, they would not just talk about it: they would take positive steps to assist those who had been wronged. If a person is injured, one rushes him to hospital; one does not hold a “help the injured” conference.

The Sense of Monotheism

The essence of religion is monotheism. Belief in one God implies trusting God above all else and reserving all one's emotions of love and fear and hope for Him alone. Man has been endowed with the ability to think and to feel. He needs a focal point to relate to; to place his trust in; to depend upon and cherish. Man is thus forced by his very nature and by the circumstances in which he finds himself on earth, to seek some external source of dependence. Unable to rely on his own scant inner resources, he seeks a prop in life – one who will compensate for his own shortcoming. But the taking of entities other than God to oneself as objects of worship is, like polytheism, no solution to the problem. True monotheism, in accordance with which feelings of devotion and adoration are directed towards God, the one and only God, is the true solution.

Islam, therefore, demands, that all of one's attention be turned to God, to the exclusion of all else.

We turn to the Qur'an to understand the exact nature of this relationship where the emotions of love, fear and trust are integral parts of it:

"There are some who make others equal to God, bestowing on them the adoration due to God, though; the love of God is stronger in the faithful. But if only they could see their punishment, the wrong doers would know that might is His alone, and that God is stern in retribution" (2:165).

"Allah – there is no god but Him; In Allah let the faithful put their trust" (64:13).

"They vied with each other in good works and called on Us with piety, fear and submission" (21:90).

A true monotheist, as the verses reveal, is one who discovers God in all His perfection. It is then only natural that one should be filled with love and devotion for Him above all else, and fear Him more than anything else. Lest one should incur His wrath. When one takes to God in this way, one's hopes and fears are associated with Him to such a degree that he becomes one's greatest treasure. This is indeed the greatest of all the discoveries that man can make.

20 May 1985

God Gives and God Takes Away

Gifted with unusual capabilities, Professor Mujeeb (1902-1985) was ranked among the top intellectuals of Indian Muslims. Having received his education in Europe he was equally well-versed in English, German and French, besides Urdu. One of his innumerable accomplishments was being able to recite great stretches of Shakespeare by heart. He had held the post of Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia for a record period of 25 years, from 1948 to 1973.

But fate was against him. In December 1972, he had to undergo a brain operation. This was a success in that it saved his life, but he lost his exceptional memory altogether as a result. A master of five languages, he could not retain even the alphabets – not even that of Urdu. A man of cheerful disposition, who when he had found someone in a dejected mood, would say, “Smile please, and look ahead,” was now himself reduced almost to a vegetable state.

He passed the rest of his life in this terrible state of near insanity in his residence in Okhla, New Delhi. On 20th January 1985, at the age of 82, he breathed his last.

Addressing man in the Qur'an, it is said:

“God created you, and He will cause you to die. Some of you shall have your lives prolonged to abject old age, when all that you once knew you shall know no more. Allah is Knowing, Mighty” (16:70).

Old age following youth serves as a reminder to make man conscious of his reality. It is to make man learn that he has no knowledge of his own, and that everything in his possession is a gift from God. He can give or take away as He pleases. If man's knowledge or power were innate they could never be taken away. But finding and losing indicates that man is only a recipient: nothing belongs to him.

We frequently come across such incidents. But we seldom take heed. Neither do the 'old' ones, who undergo them learn any lesson from them nor do the 'young' ones who witness them

Current Affairs

The Solidarity that Comes from Fear

The British nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror was in the thick of the conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands (April-June, 1982). It was the Conqueror which fired the three torpedoes that sunk the Argentinian cruiser General Belgrano on May 2, 1982, thus initiating the shooting war proper.

Lieutenant Nyrena Sathia was one of the crew of the submarine. In a 51-page diary, which has come into the possession of The Washington Post newspaper, he describes "the day-to-day activities on the Conqueror from April 6, just after it set sail for the Falklands, until its return to port almost three months later."

One of the incidents covered in this "extraordinary diary" occurred on May 5. A leak developed in one of the steam generators that drove the submarine's propulsion system. This, the diarist writes, "is probably going to require us" to drop to lower power, providing not more than 15 knots. He goes on:

"This could be disastrous – suicidal – if attempting evasive maneuvers after an attack. Christ! I hope politicians see sense and call it a day. The ships company remains nervous and subdued, though performing their duties admirably. The whole thing seems to have brought us closer together than ever before..

(The Guardian Weekly, February 24, 1985)

Countless incidents of this nature can be cited to show that people who share a common fear come closer together than they had been during times of comparative composure. Nations always hold together more firmly during wartime, burying their differences and presenting a united front to their enemy. Petty squabbles only surface when the clouds of war have cleared.

The whole of mankind is facing a threat much more acute – much more real – than any wartime threat. The spectre of the Day of Judgment looms above the world, ready to engulf all in its wake. On that day God Himself will become manifest to man. Reality will become plain for all to see. There will be no opportunity for denial, no room to run away. Only those who become conscious of the realities of that day before they actually descend will be successful in the future, eternal world of God.

If mankind were to realize the common concern that they all share to escape the torments of that day, then they would all come close together. This is the only fear that can provide real and universal human solidarity, for its object is inevitable – it is bound to come to pass – and is at the same time shared by the whole of mankind.

Unenviable Enclave

In September 1984 Britain concluded a treaty with China formalizing the arrangements for transfer of power in 1997. Capitalism has been highly successful in Hong Kong. So much so that even Communist China has agreed not to tamper with the present system for at least fifty years after Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, commenting on the agreement, said it was astonishing "that the world's largest Communist country is setting out to maintain probably the most lively, most dynamic, most successful, capitalist community" (*The Guardian*, October 7, 1984).

Yet the "success" of Hong Kong, which has impressed even the implacable foes of capitalism in Peking, is a very superficial one. If one looks beneath the glossy surface, one finds minds seething with discontent, souls pining for inner peace. The Chinese in Hong Kong have a saying that "one in ten go crazy." According to the territory's chief Psychiatric Consultant, Dr. W.H. Low, cramped living conditions, intense competition at school and work, noise pollution, long working hours and the frenetic way of life, all contribute to high levels of stress and neurosis among the Hong Kong people.

Common symptoms of stress are present in abundance, with one in ten of Hong Kong males, aged 40-60, suffering from peptic ulcer in any given year. As for functional dyspepsia, gastroenterologist Professor S.K. Lam says it affects "about four in five of our patients. The patient complains of constant stomach pain, but when you investigate you find nothing except that there is a lot of tension in some part of their lives."

Chaplin Marvin Wray, who runs a stress management clinic, says that the symptoms of stress are more acute in Hong Kong than in the United States. Family breakups and alcoholism are on the increase. Noise pollution is also a major problem, with motor ways often passing within as little as two feet (less than a metre) from people's homes. "It is not unusual," says Rob Law, a spokesman for Hong Kong Environmental Protection Agency, "to find that someone who has run amok and chopped up his neighbours did so because they had the T.V. on too loudly."

This is the reality that lies behind the glittering facade of Hong Kong's affluence. The truth of the matter is that the price that has to be paid for material affluence is spiritual bankruptcy. That is why the Qur'an calls the benefits of this worldly life "poison" to which one should not strain one's eyes (20:131). To set one's sights on the fleeting pleasures of this world is to forfeit both inner contentment in this world, and eternal blessings in the life to come.

23 May 1985

Destruction is not defeat: it is an opportunity to build anew

The President of Cuba, Fidel Castro, lists American author Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961) among his favourite writers. In an interview, he told the Havana paper '*Granma*' that Hemingway's books had always been good company to him. For Castro, the struggle of a classic Hemingway hero is like that of the Cuban people since the revolution of 1959. "We have also been vulnerable and exposed to destruction for decades.... Hemingway was right: a man can be destroyed, but never beaten."

23 May 1985

Foresight is a result of intellectual curiosity

J.L. Garvin was editor of *The Observer* (London) from 1908 to 1942. Famed as “the most celebrated editorial writer in the world” he owed his influence in no small part to a gift of prescience: his predictions and warnings for the future were repeatedly proved right. David Ayerst writes in his biography “*Garvin of the Observer*” that his foresight was a result of intellectual curiosity, illustrated by a letter to his son in the trenches in 1915: “Will science ever give distant vision as it now gives distant sound? I think that must come, and wish we were so far.”

(*The Guardian Weekly*, February 10, 1985)

The Prophet and His Companions

Giving everything but wanting no worldly return

When the Muslims of Mecca emigrated to Medina, the Prophet told the Ansar of Medina that these Muhajirs were their brothers and sisters; they had left their own properties and families and come to live with them in Medina. "We will give them half of our date groves," the Ansar replied, "and leave half for ourselves. "There is something else you can give them," the Prophet said. "What is that, Prophet of God?" the Ansar asked. "The people of Mecca know nothing of farming and horticulture," the Prophet told them. "You do the work on their behalf and then divide the produce." The Ansar said that they had understood what the Prophet said and would obey him. Jabir says that when the Ansar used to weigh their date crop; they would divide the dates into two portions, one larger and the other smaller. They would put the branches in with the smaller portion. Then they would give the larger portion to the Muhajirs, and keep the smaller one themselves. This system continued until the Conquest of Khyber. When Bahrain was conquered, the prophet wanted to give the land to the Ansar, but they declined the offer saying that the Muhajirs should receive an equal amount first. "That is not possible," the Prophet told them. "In that case you will have to be patient until you meet me in the next world, for after I have gone others will be given priority over you."

Longing for paradise

Bashir says that when the emigrant Muslims arrived in Medina from Mecca, the water of Medina did not suit them. A man of the Bani Ghaffar tribe owned a well which went by the name of Beir Roma. The Muhajirs liked its water, and they used to buy one flask off the owner for one 'Mudd' (a quarter of a sa's). The Prophet asked the owner to sell him the well in return for one spring in heaven. The owner replied that he and his family had no other means of livelihood, so he could not give it to the Prophet just like that. Uthman heard about this incident, and he bought Beir Roma for 35,000 dirhams. Then he came to the Prophet. "Will I also receive a spring in heaven in return for this well," he asked. "Of course," the Prophet replied. So Uthman donated it to the Muslim public.